Semantic Derogation and Animal Expressions in Mandarin Chinese
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Abstract

Many fixed expressions are used metaphorically to describe humans, especially animal fixed expressions (Hsieh, 2004). The gender biases can also be found in the metaphors with animal terms. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the way animal fixed expressions are used in Mandarin Chinese, and further uncover the gender biases by means of Lakoff and Turner’s (1989) Great Chain of Being Metaphor and the theories about semantic derogation. The data collected in the current study mainly come from Corpus of Animal Fixed Expressions in Mandarin Chinese, and others are classified from online dictionaries. The result shows that (1) the attributes of animals are about characters, appearances, intelligence, eating habits, and sounds which is applied significantly in Mandarin Chinese. For example, 黃鶯出谷 ‘very nice singing’ is a metaphor with sound attribute mapped. (2) The animal species describing males and females are different. For instance, men are usually compared to strong and large animals like tigers or wolves, whereas women are described as smaller birds or insects with wings like chickens or butterflies. The examples 牛郎 ‘male prostitute’ and 野雞 ‘female prostitute’ may present the notion. (3) The relationship between humans and body parts are frequently collocated in Mandarin Chinese animal fixed expressions. 虎父無犬子 ‘there will be no laggard among the children of a brave or talented man’ can exemplify the importance of human relations in Mandarin Chinese and 蛾眉 ‘beautiful woman’ is another example for body parts in the animal fixed expressions. (4) Most important of all, though both genders may be abused when compared to animals, more negative animal fixed expressions are found toward females. Also, the semantic derogation found in Mandarin Chinese can be understood as part of Chinese traditional discipline.

Keywords: animal metaphor, Mandarin Chinese, cognitive linguistic, semantic derogation, Great Chain of Being Metaphor